THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND OF CONNECTICUT

BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES

Sunday, Nov. 5, 2023, New London, 9:00 AM.

President Melley called the meeting of The NFB of CT to order at 9:20 AM.

Roll Call: NFB Board: Veronica Alston (Board Member), Jim McCollum (Board Member), Nathanael Wales (1st Vice-President), Maryanne Melley (President), Mary Silverberg (2nd Vice-President), Deb Reed (Board Member), Cheri Duquette (Treasurer).

Board Members Absent: Becky Ireland (Secretary), Beth Rival (Board Member).

Members Present: Joe Kolczynski, Gwen Cheong, Johnston Cheong, Sara and Randy Bellavance (of Portland, Maine), George Reed, Len Schlenk, Isabel Rosario, Anne West, Hope Gregory, Kristen Dockendorff, Paul Duquette, Judy Potter, Allison Arbuckle, Jim Cronin, Esther Levegnale, Carolyn Dodd, Chrissy & Jim Scrimgeour, Marchele Davis, Shondra Rosetta, Justin Salisbury, Lucia Lee, Brianna Rigsby, Melissa Thompson, Ralph Dooley, Peter Sileo, Encole Stewart, Renee Perry, Pat Bennett, Lizzy Cappelli, Sam Taylor.

National Representative: Gary Wunder,

Pres. Melley led the members in the NFB pledge.

Reports:

Minutes for November 6, 2022:

Joe Kolczynski read the November 6, 2022, minutes to the members.

There were 2 corrections noted.

Under PAC Len’s email should start with LFS not IFS.

Under New Business it was Melissa Thompson not Marchele Davis who took over for

Korrine Herlth.

Justin Salisbury wanted to clarify that his suggestion was that we partner our newsletter with the other states in our area. This would include accepting articles and sharing our newsletter with them.

A Motion to accept November 6, 2022, minutes was made by Len Schlenk; Seconded: Johnston Cheong; Vote: Unanimous, motion passes, minutes approved.

Treasurer’s Report:

Treasurer Cheri Duquette gave the following report:

These are the balances for our accounts as of November 3, 2023:

Bank Accounts:

Checking account balance: $135,053.77

Savings account balance: $52,611.93

TTL Bank Accounts $187,665.7

General Funds: $142,965.86

Restricted Funds: $44,699.84

Blackford Fund: $1,506.04

Cummins Scholarship: $4,473.91

Demarest Fund: $6,419.95

Higley Scholarship Fund: $334.95

Betty/Bruce Woodward Scholarship: $0.00

BELL Program: $0.00

NFB of CT Technology Fund: $1,435.19

At Large Chapter - temporary holdings: $318.93

Waterbury Chapter - temporary holdings: $0.00

CT Association of Blind Students (CTABS): $798.26

CT Association of Guide Dog Users - temporary holdings: $397.05

Southwest CT Chapter - temporary holdings: $87.19

Hartford Chapter - temporary holdings: $490.05

State Convention Sponsorships: $0.00

Zukowski Family Foundation Scholarship: $0.00

Shoreline Chapter - temporary holdings: $0.00

Harlow Grant: $28,438.32 awards pending.

Treasurer Duquette mentioned that the temporary funds held for the Waterbury and Shoreline chapters were closed out and funds were returned to the NFB account. She also mentioned that on December 2nd of this year, the funds for the Southwest chapter will also be closed out and funds absorbed into account.

Comments and Questions:

Pres. Melley asked, “What is the amount of our liquid funds?”

Tr. Duquette replied, “The amount of the liquid fund is $142,965.86.

Randy Bellavance asked if the temporary funds we hold for certain chapters is because they are not self-sustaining.

Pres. Melley replied, “Correct, we hold the funds for 3 years until they can reopen. If they cannot reopen the funds are absorbed into our account.

Pres. Melley mentioned that Jim Cronin has provided a Chapter constitution to the Board for approval. If approved by the Board, it will then go to the National office for approval. This can take time and requested that the closeout date of December 2, 2023, for the Southwest chapter funds, be extended so that the money can remain with the newly formed chapter.

1st VP Nathanael Wales made a motion to extend December 2, 2023, deadline for the Southwest chapter funds to June 25, 2024, seconded: TR. Cheri Duquette; Vote: Unanimous, motion passes, extension approved.

Board Member Deb Reed made a motion to accept the Treasurer’s report; Seconded: Len Schlenk; Vote: Unanimous, motion passes, report accepted.

ABPVI (Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired) 2nd Vice-President Mary Silverberg reported the following:

The Board proposed the following dates for their meetings in 2024. They are March 21st, June 20th, Sept. 19th, and Dec. 19th. All dates fall on Thursday.

Blind Americans Equality Day was held on Friday, Oct 13th at BESB from 10 AM to 12 PM. Pres. Melley attended on behalf of the NFB of CT. There were two panel discussions: Pre-employment Transition services and Usher Syndrome.

Administrative Items:

D BESB’s new hires included Elena Caraballo for Technology Rehabilitation Teacher, Tanzania Argemone for Bilingual Counselor, Rayah Martin for Processing Technician she is leaving her secretary position for this position. Also, interviews were held for a Transition Counselor and the Rehabilitation Technologist for Adult services will be reposted.

Aging and Disability Services, ADS, is getting a new logo. Options were sent out for voting and the results will be announced soon.

Adult Services:

Gary Allen has joined as its first Rehabilitation Technologist and a second Technologist is being sought.

Planning continues for the older individuals Technology Assistance Center.

Adult Services is working with the IT group on creating an electronically fillable Eye Report form.

Children Services:

Anna-Kaye Pascarella has been hired as Quality Control Reviewer.

Children Services currently has 29 Education Consultants, three O and M Instructors, 1 Rehabilitation Instructors, and 17 Itinerant teachers who are employed by cities and towns.

There are currently 916 active clients in Children Services.

Catherine reported on programs that included music, nature, and life skills. She also spoke about events at Mystic Seaport and Beardsley Zoo.

Programs were held to practice cane skills and learn about FIDELCO.

Accessible Parking Placards:

A work group has been established to study them. No details were available on this matter.

The Advisory board is looking for members if interested in applying please contact 2nd VP Silverberg or BM Reed.

The next meeting will be held on Dec. 14th.

Comments and Questions:

2ndVP Silverberg asked if anybody knew what the different color handicap placards meant.

Justin Salisbury stated that years ago National had made a resolution structurally opposing Blindness making a person eligible for these parking permits. They felt it might impede the Blind from learning their mobility skills.

Several members spoke about this. Although they knew where National is coming from, they mentioned that these parking permits can be very useful to us.

Pres. Melly mentioned that not all of us travelled as well as others, and it should be their choice whether or not to use the parking permits.

Len Schlenk made a motion to accept the ABPVI report; Seconded: Nathanael Wales; Vote: unanimous, motion passes, report accepted.

SRC (State Rehabilitation Council); Deb Reed reported the following:

At their Sept. 23 meeting, Bill DeMaio, head of Parks and Rec in Newington, was voted in as Vice-Chair of the Council.

Director Jenkins proposed a budget for the SRC for an amount between $10,000 and $20,000. This motion was made and passed unanimously. The proposed use of these funds is to send SRC members to out of state conferences and networking with other Councils throughout the country.

This month’s success story is Halle Jackson. She is a UConn student studying Stem Cell Biology and research. This summer she had some work experience at a stem cell biology lab and has been invited back next summer. Her work in the lab was made possible with bifocals and magnification. She has been a client of BESB for about 8 years and has become a mentor to fellow students.

Len Schlenk made a motion to accept the SRC report; Seconded: Anne West; Vote: unanimous, motion passes, Report accepted.

PAC (Pre-Authorized Contribution) Plan: Len Schlenk

Len reported the following:

He stated that 17 members out of 80 have signed up for the plan.

He continued to encourage members to sign up. He said you can donate as little or as much as you want.

You have the choice of having your donation automatically deducted from your checking account or a credit card.

If you are interested in signing up, you can call 877-nfb-2pac or go to nfb.org.

Pres. Melley stated that the money donated to the PAC plan goes to a variety of funds, such as the White Cane, grants, legal funds, and others that help the Blind.

BCAC (Bureau Consumer Advocacy Committee): Melissa Thompson

Melissa was not present at this time.

No report was given.

New Business:

Museum of the Blind Peoples Movement: Pres. Maryanne Melley; A short video about the Museum was played for the members. Pres. Melley spoke to the members about making a pledge to the Museum of The Blind Peoples Movement. She told the members that she would like Connecticut to pledge $25,000 over a 5-year period or $5,000 a year.

A motion was made and seconded to pledge $25,000 over a 5-year period to the Museum of the Blind Peoples Movement. Vote: unanimous, motion passes, pledge approved.

Birdies for Charity: Mary Silverberg reported the following:

Our goal for 2023 was $2,500 and we were just shy of reaching our goal.

We raised $2,000 in donations and 15% from Travelers in the amount of $300. For a total of $2,300.

There were 24 donors, 4 more than in 2022.

We had 8 donors from our May and June mailers, an increase of 3 from last year.

Total donations from mailings in 2022 was $215. This year we received $325, an increase over last year.

Questions and Comments:

Randy Bellavance asked what is Birdies for Charity?

2nd VP Silverberg gave a brief explanation about Birdies for Charity and how it works.

Conversion to QuickBooks; Cheri Duquette

Tr. Duquette stated that the NFB has converted to QuickBooks. This new system will connect all affiliate treasurers with National. Since National has access they can check each affiliates account eliminating the need to submit reports. She mentioned that converting to the new system is done and they are currently completing training with the JAWS program. She briefly described how she uses it to manage our account.

Leave of Absence: Pres. Maryanne Melley

Pres. Melley informed the members that on December 6th she will undergo knee replacement surgery and will be taking a 6 week leave of absence. She stated that 1st VP Wales will be running the affiliate and to send any questions or concerns to him. Also, 2nd VP Silverberg will be running the Washington seminar this year.

Bench for Steve Famiglietti:

2nd VP Silverberg informed the members the bench we donated in Steve’s memory is at Oak Hill and will be installed. She said it was a classic bench with a bronze plaque. Joe Kolczynski read to the members what was written upon the plaque. Photos of both were passed out to the members.

Washington Seminar Appointments; Mary Silverberg and Joe Kolczynski

2nd VP Silverberg stated the seminar is from Jan. 29th to Feb. 1st. She then gave an overview of the itinerary of events at the seminar.

The NFB block of rooms for participants is now open. Please make your reservations, rooms will be added to the block, as necessary.

The rates per night will be $188 plus tax for a total of $217.

If you are interested in participating in the seminar, please contact 2nd VP Silverberg.

Donations Update; Cheri Duquette

Tr. Duquette reviewed donations we received from 2018 to 2023. She provided the following numbers:

For 2018: $81,620.13 (These were collected by phone calls done by telephone callers. Starting in 2019 we sent mailings.)

For 2019: $68,099.83

For 2020: $63,691.76

For 2021: $61,422.00 (This was during the pandemic.)

For 2022: $68,514.00

For 2023: $70,163.11

Tr. Duquette stated that overall, the mailings are working very well for us.

Pres. Melley mentioned that in 2018 we still had our office. After paying the expenses for the office we were left with a net of about $18,000. This was the reason the Board decided to close down the office. Without this expense we can use the donations to fund our other activities.

Vote on Grant/Travel Expense amount for Washington Seminar; Explanation of New Name; Maryanne Melley

Pres. Melley stated that at the last Presidential retreat, she was informed we can no longer use the term subsidy when talking about money used to aid members to attend events. If it is given to a member, it is a grant, if it is a Board member it is a travel expense.

Pres. Melly asked members to suggest an amount for the grant/travel expense for the seminar. Last year it was $550.

Marchele Davis made a motion for a $600 for this year’s Grant/Travel Expense for the Washington Seminar; Second: 1st VP Nathanael Wales; Vote: unanimous, motion passes, grant/travel expense approved.

Resolution 2023-01 Accessible Absentee Ballot Voting

Joe Kolczynski read Resolution 2023-01 to the members.

A motion was made and seconded to approve Resolution 2023-01 Accessible Absentee Ballot Voting. Vote: unanimous, motion passes, resolution approved.

Elections; Gary Wunder, Moderator

Pres. Melley explained the procedures for nominating and voting for the elections of members of the Board.

Elections:

Board Member:

Allison Arbuckle: nominated by committee.

No nominations from the floor.

A motion was made by 1st VP Wales to cease nominations and to vote by acclamation. Seconded: 2nd VP Silverberg. Vote: unanimous, motion passes, vote for acclamation approved.

Board Member-2 years

Veronica Alston: nominated by Committee,

Melissa Thompson: Nominated from the floor.

A motion was made by Len Schlenk to close nominations and move to elections. Seconded: 1st VP Wales; Vote: unanimous, motion passes, move to vote approved.

Election results:

Allison Arbuckle Board Member

Veronica Alston Board Member (2 Year term).

Congratulations to all.

Thank You gift for Gary Wunder:

Pres. Melley presented Gary Wunder with a gift to remember us by. She thanked him for coming to our convention. She said that it was a pleasure to have him and hopes he will come back again. The gift bag included slippers and ball cap from UConn, honey made in Connecticut, and a NFB of CT shirt.

Location for our 2024 State Convention

Pres. Melley stated that we will need a new location for our 2024 convention. She asked members for any suggestions.

Members had a brief discussion about several locations, New Haven, Wallingford, and Meriden were suggested.

January Board meeting, where and when?

Pres. Melley stated the next Board meeting will be Jan. 13, 2024, and asked who would like to host us.

The Greater Hartford Chapter will host the meeting, details for time and place will follow.

Chapter News

Central CT Chapter: Deb Reed

BM Reed stated They had a successful fundraiser in October and described the event. She said they are looking to have the CTLABs traveling can attend one of their meetings. Also, the Chapter raised their PAC plan donation from $15 to $20 and donated $250 to the NFB of CT Technology fund.

At Large Chapter: Allison Arbuckle

Allison stated that she had her first meeting as President of the chapter. Their November meeting will be about the convention and their experiences. Going forward, she wants to talk about doing outreach and getting to know her members.

Greater Hartford Chapter: Melissa Thompson

Melissa stated at their next meeting they will discuss the convention and their experiences. Going forward, they will talk about doing outreaches, being more involved as a group, and individualized PAC plan donations.

South Fairfield County Chapter: Jim Cronin

Jim stated they approved of the Chapter Constitution and have forwarded it to Pres. Melley for approval by the Board. If approved by the Board, it will then go to President Riccobono. Once they receive their Charter, they will elect officers.

Southern CT Chapter: Marchele Davis

Marchele stated she asked each member to present something at their meetings. She said a new member described her experiences of being blind. She also mentioned they have gained 4 to 6 new members since September. They will have speakers from Achilles and BESB at future meetings.

Meeting adjourned at 11:56 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,

Rebecca Ireland

Secretary